

### **Flood Bill Focuses on Long-Term Solutions**

**By Stephanie Herseth Sandlin**

Flood response, recovery and hazard mitigation has long been an important priority of mine while serving in Congress. As South Dakotans, we know firsthand how seasonal flooding affects the livelihood of our communities and families. This year, as in the past several years, flooding has impacted large sections of our state – damaging roads and hurting our local economy. The President recently approved the sixth presidential disaster declaration for South Dakota since this past winter. And there's no letup in sight. The Sioux Falls area was recently under a flood watch, parts of Brookings and Flandreau were evacuated and Vermillion experienced hail large enough to break car windows.

Since April, I've held nine community meetings throughout the state to discuss with constituents how flooding is affecting them. These meetings were designed to develop ideas about how South Dakotans can best work together and with local, state and federal officials to minimize the impact of flooding on our state's homes, businesses, and roads. I have met with Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Craig Fugate, as well as other state and federal stakeholders, to review the flooding damage and discuss potential sources of flood relief and recovery resources. We all agreed that band-aid approaches aren't working and we need to be proactive in forming long-term mitigation plans.

I believe local communities need better tools to prepare and recover from flooding, and that's why I recently introduced the Rural Flood Mitigation and Recovery Act of 2010. This legislation is a direct result of information gathered during the community meetings. It provides a comprehensive approach to reduce the yearly impact of flooding on South Dakota and to improve the ability of rural communities to access hazard mitigation assistance.

The legislation focuses on three areas: assistance for rural and flood-prone communities in accessing mitigation programs; helping Native American tribes better manage the effects of repeated disasters; and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of overall federal disaster assistance.

Importantly, the bill reduces the local share for hazard mitigation projects in flood-prone areas to make it easier for small, rural communities to access these programs. Because it doesn't make

sense to keep repairing the same roads year after year, the bill would allow counties and local communities to make improvements to roads and other infrastructure so they are protected from flooding in future years. This makes sense for the long-term economic health of both our state and the nation.

For Native American tribes in rural areas, this bill develops programs to increase access to technical assistance needed to better manage federal disasters. The bill also improves tribal access to FEMA's Individual Assistance program so that individuals and families can get the help they need when flooding ruins homes and livelihoods.

In addition, to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of FEMA's flood response in rural areas, the bill requires a number of studies on hazard mitigation and recovery programs, including a U.S. Government Accountability Office report assessing whether the presidential disaster declaration process is meeting the needs of rural communities and Native American reservations; a FEMA study on improving communication with state and local governments, and a second GAO report on simplifying the application process for hazard mitigation projects.

Our rural communities deserve better when it comes to combating the impact of seasonal flooding, and that's why I am dedicated to working on solutions to make sure we are preparing for our future by providing long-term solutions to the flooding experienced by rural communities.

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